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Written statement* submitted by the Society for Threatened Peoples, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[16 February 2015]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Human rights in Mali: Increasing violence and impunity in northern Mali

Since the launching of the European training mission EUTM Mali, two years ago, there has been no significant improvement of the security situation in Mali. In fact, the severe situation in the regions of Kidal, Gao and Timbuktu lasted for three years now and caused a flood of refugees. In January 2015, the UN Refugee Agency estimated 133,002 Malian refugees in Mali and its neighboring countries. Due to the latest violent incidents, they can't return to their home towns.

Within the very first 31 days of 2015, Society for Threatened Peoples has documented at least 17 attacks in the surroundings of Gao, Timbuktu and Kidal. These attacks, led by different armed groups that are active in northern Mali, resulted in the killing of more than 50 people; among them civilians, soldiers of the Malian army as well as of the MINUSMA. The hostilities between the Tuareg movement MNLA and the pro-government GATIA militia in the towns of Tabankort and Tessit jeopardize any attempts to achieve a durable peace settlement.

There is a blatant lack of protection for the civilian population in northern Mali. The Malian army is obviously overtaxed with the increasing attacks of the militant groups and can't guarantee the safety of the civilian population. In fact, the Fama, due to its defeat in May 2014 in Kidal, has abandoned its military bases in the North of Mali. As a consequence, the Malian soldiers lost their last bit of integrity. In the eyes of the Malian population the soldiers, whether they are soldiers of the Malian force, the MINUSMA or even of the French operation "Barkhane" are neither competent nor trustworthy.

The only groups gaining profit from this status quo are Islamist militant organizations like "Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)" or the "Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJWA)". The last four weeks show very clearly a rise in Islamic attacks. By now, jihadist groups use suicide attacks, mine laying or explosive devices and ambushes to fulfil their ambition which reveal a professionalization of their methods.

We are convinced that without the political will of the Government of Mali a long-term peace project is not likely. If the content of the previously failed peace agreements will be not evaluated and improved, new conflicts with the Tuareg and other ethnic groups in northern Mali are inevitable. Therefore, a thoroughly considered peace resolution is absolutely mandatory. Six months after launching the peace negotiations in Algeria there has been no reliable result. The last peace talks in November 2014 ended without any outcome. Therefore, a durable peace agreement is crucial for the repatriation of the Malian refugees.

During three years of fighting massive human rights violations have been committed by all conflict parties. Summary executions, rape and other forms of sexual violence, the recruitment of child soldiers, attacks on places of worship and protected cultural assets and the deliberate targeting of the civilian population have been documented by many human rights organizations. Even the International Criminal Court (ICC) has opened an investigation in serious crimes committed in Mali since January 2012. All persons responsible for these crimes should be brought to justice, in Mali or before the ICC.

An unknown number of Tuareg activists or presumed radical Islamist fighters have been arrested by French, Chadian or Malian security forces. The European Union has announced in January 2015 to provide 4 million Euro for the construction of a high-security prison in Mali for former Jihadist fighters. But there is a complete lack of information on the number of the arrested Islamists or other militiamen, their identities and the judicial procedure which has been launched. Nobody knows if a new Guantanamo-style detention center will be built in Sahara and how the presumed

Islamists will be brought to what justice. There is an urgent need for more transparency in the judicial process to end impunity in order to ensure that basic human rights of the accused will be respected.

The Human Rights Council should urge the Government of Mali and the international community:

- to ensure a better protection of the civilian population in northern Mali,
- to encourage and support the reconciliation between different ethnic groups in the conflict region,
- to urge all conflict parties to search for a peaceful political solution to the Tuareg-crisis,
- to guarantee more transparency in the judicial procedure to end impunity for massive crimes committed in northern Mali.